



The Independent Pricing & Regulatory Tribunal
PO Box K35
HAYMARKET POST SHOP NSW 2000

31 July 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

**FIT FOR THE FUTURE INITIATIVE
PALERANG COUNCIL**

The Bungendore Residents Group Inc. wish to express concern over the process adopted by Palerang Council with respect to the Fit for the Future (FFTF) initiative and the content of their submission.

We understand the FFTF process was commenced in 2011 and Councils were instructed on the processes they needed to follow around October/November 2014.

Despite this, Palerang Council only notified the Bungendore community of the FFTF initiative on or about the 26 May 2015.

This consultation included an 'Information Sheet' and a notification of a public meeting, together with a survey form. In most cases, Council's documents did not arrive in letterboxes until the day of, or after, the date's set for the public meetings which were held on the 26 May 2015 (Braidwood Council Chambers) & 27 May 2015 (Bungendore Council Chambers).

The information sheet provided by Palerang Council mirrored the information at the public meetings and concluded that Palerang was Fit for the Future as a stand-alone Council, with very little information to support this conclusion and little to no information on alternatives. The alternatives mentioned were to merge with Queanbeyan Council or 'Palering be split up among adjoining councils such as Goulburn, Yass, Shoalhaven and Cooma-Monaro Councils'. No information about the option to split the Council, other than this one sentence posed in the survey, was provided.

On the 25 June 2015 Palerang Council held an Extraordinary Council meeting to discuss the content of the FFTF submission.

Bungendore Residents Group
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While the meeting invited public comment and participation, members of the public were not allowed to view a copy of the draft submission and Councillors themselves only received the draft submission a few hours before the meeting on the 25 June 2015.

Even though Council concluded they were FFTF as a stand-alone Council, their own survey showed that 45% of the community wanted alternatives considered. Our own online survey results show that:

- 79% did not believe they were provided sufficient information
- 77% do not believe they were given sufficient time to make an informed decision
- 79% said that other options beside Palerang as a stand-alone council should be explored, and
- 71% believe Palerang Council should not remain as is.

Palerang Council prepared and forwarded its final submission to the Independent Local Government Review Panel on the 29 June however the submission was not made public prior to it being sent.

We have subsequently learnt that Palerang Council's submission justified its conclusion that they were financially viable for FFTF on the basis of two subdivisions (600-700 and 300 lots) which would more than double the current population of Bungendore. Bungendore village has already undergone a doubling of its size in the last 10 years so Council's proposal has the potential to quadruple the population in a relatively short space of time.

- These proposed subdivisions are 'proposed' only and on land which is currently zoned rural.
- There is no current development application before Palerang Council to re-zone this land to enable these subdivisions.
- There is no DA before Council for any aspect of these proposed developments.

Despite this, Council has hastily assumed these developments will occur, that the land will be rezoned and the development applications approved.

This has occurred with no consultation with the community.

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In addition, Palerang Council has also included in their submission, a 7% accumulative general rate increase above the capped rate over 5 years. Palerang residents have not been adequately informed of this proposal, and have not been given the opportunity to evaluate it or the implications of it.

We consider the process adopted by Palerang Council did not allow the community adequate time or information to properly examine and understand the implications of Palerang Council's proposal and its commitment of public monies, in order to support their conclusion that they are FFTF as a stand-alone Council. We further believe that the 'survey' process may have been flawed as there were no means of identifying the origin of the completed survey.

We do not believe that appropriate due process has been observed nor has the community been fully informed of the ramifications of the proposals as submitted by Palerang Council including approx. 900-1,000 lot housing developments and a substantial general rate hike (above the capped rate) over five years.

The lack of community consultation with the community is nothing new. In the lead up to the revision of the LEP, various community organisations initiated 'visioning workshops' in the absence of any Council initiated consultation. As a result of the community initiative, Council then conducted some limited consultation via vox pop surveys. The results, which are supported in Council documents, provide a very different long term community direction for Palerang which is at odds with Council staff's direction as proposed in their FFTF submission.

We would request that consideration be given to an independent review of Palerang Council and the options available in terms of amalgamation, a dissemination of Palerang to other Councils or a restructure of the current Council rather than have it continue in its current form.

Yours sincerely

John Taylor
President

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